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SUBJECT: CONTINUED REFUGEE FLOWS WORRY THAI OFFICIALS

REF: (06) CHIANG MAI 212 - MORE DISPLACED KAREN SEEK SHELTER ALONG THAI-BURMA BORDER

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¶1. (U) Continued new refugee arrivals along the Burma border are of increasing concern to Thai officials, who are struggling to deal with the problems caused by the permanence of the camps as well as the steady inflows.

¶2. (SBU) According to Wachira Chotirosseranee, Camp Commander of Site 1 Pang Khwai/Nai Soi refugee camp in Mae Hong Son, officials once primarily focused on providing immediate assistance such as food and shelter now face more complicated problems caused by the longevity of the refugee camp population.

Issues include legal status, especially for children born and raised in the camp, violence in the family, and economic pressures to seek jobs outside of the camp. Coupled with an ever increasing number of camp residents as a result of both natural growth and new arrivals, Thai officials are reportedly less patient with what they see as a protracted, unending burden of refugees.

¶3. (SBU) Wachira described to Consulate staff a November 22, 2006 visit by Ministry of Interior (MOI) Deputy Permanent Secretary Phirapol Traithasawit to the Karenni camp in Amphoe

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Muang Mae Hong Son for the opening of the UNHCR-funded and International Rescue Committee-run Legal Aid Program. The MOI official questioned why the camp population continued to surge at the worrisome rate of 50 persons a month and instructed the camp commander to control and reduce the number of new arrivals.

Wachira, who traveled to the U.S. in 2005 on the International Visitor program, instead resorted to a kind of human shell game, transferring some newcomers to stay with families inside the camp but outside of the reception area.

¶4. (SBU) Wachira expressed concern about an estimated 2,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) gathered at Ei Tu Ko on the Burmese side of the Salween River (reftel), noting that this group may cross into Mae La Oun camp south of Mae Sariang. Additional problems are caused by refugees who sneak into camps without notifying officials, a detour past the reception step that jeopardizes health prevention efforts, particularly in communicable diseases.

¶5. (U) Reviewing Thai efforts to deal with refugee issues, Wachira described an earlier policy to reduce the number of camps and signal Thailand's limited capacity after years of inflows over its borders. Now resettlement is underway, although additional efforts are necessary with third countries in addition to the U.S., which currently offers the largest resettlement program from Tham Hin and Mae La camps. In the end, he said, Thailand needs to foster democratic development

inside Burma in the hope that national reconciliation will induce displaced persons to return home.

CAMP